

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT O 00590 221346Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CAB-02 CIAE-00 COME-00
DODE-00 DOTE-00 EB-08 INR-10 NSAE-00 FAA-00 L-03
LAB-04 SIL-01 OC-06 CCO-00 WRDE-00 PA-01 IO-13
/075 W

-----116056 221915Z /45

R 221245Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2036
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMCONGEN MONTREAL
AMCONGEN TORONTO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EAIR, ELAB, TD
SUBJECT: BWIA PILOTS' ASSOCIATION CONCILIATION EFFORTS DRAG

REF: PORT OF SPAIN 490 AND PREVIOUS

1. IN PERIOD SINCE REFTEL, ALL INDICATIONS HAVE BEEN THAT
BWIA/GOTT HAS ADOPTED AN EVEN TOUGHER STANCE THAN BEFORE IN
THREE-WEEK-OLD PILOTS' STRIKE. PRESS REPORTS, CONFIRMED
IN GENERAL TERMS BY PILOTS TO LABOFF, INDICATE THAT BWIA NOW
IS DEMANDING DISMISSAL OF TWELVE PILOTS, INCLUDING SEVERAL
MEMBERS OF ALPA EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, AS PREREQUISITE FOR ENDING
DISPUTE. COMPANY REPORTEDLY IS UNWILLING TO DISCUSS THE
ISSUE WHICH STARTED THE DISPUTE, REINSTATEMENT OF GROUNDED
PILOT, MALCOLM HERNANDEZ, AND IS ALSO SEEKING TO REDUCE
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PAGE 02 PORT O 00590 221346Z

PILOTS' PRIVILEGES IF AND WHEN THEY RETURN TO WORK.
PILOTS THUS FAR HAVE REJECTED BWIA'S CONDITIONS AND
HENCE CONCILIATION TALKS BEING HELD UNDER AUSPOCES
OF INDUSTRIAL COURT ARE MAKING NO PROGRESS.

2. THERE IS OTHER EVIDENCE, THAT, FOR THE PRESENT AT
LEAST, GOTT INTENDS TO MAINTAIN A HARD LINE IN THE

BWIA SITUATION. ALTHOUGH PM WILLIAMS HAS MADE NO PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON STRIKE, HE IS HEADING A HURRIEDLY-SET-UP MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE CHARGED WITH INVESTIGATING HIRING PRACTICES OF STATE-OWNED COMPANIES, STARTING WITH BWIA. PRESS HAS REPORTED THAT STRIKE HAS BEEN SUBJECT OF CABINET DISCUSSIONS AS WELL. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF RULING PEOPLE'S NATIONAL MOVEMENT (PNM) HAS ISSUED STATEMENT EXPRESSING FULL SUPPORT FOR GOTT IN THE DISPUTE. FINALLY, T&T LABOR CONGRESS EFFORTS AT CONCILIATION HAVE GONE NOWHERE, PRIMARILY BECAUSE, ACCORDING TO KNOWLEDGEABLE BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION SOURCE, COMPANY REMAINS ADAMANT ON HERNANDEZ ISSUE.

3. COMMENT. ALL PRESENT EVIDENCE INDICATES THAT STRIKE IS NO NEARER SOLUTION THAN BEFORE. OBVIOUS BWIA/GOTT STRATEGY IS TO MAINTAIN TOUGH LINE WITH ALPS ON ASSUMPTION THAT PILOTS WILL BE FORCED BY ECONOMIC PRESSURE TO GIVE UP BEFORE LONG. THIS STRATEGY IS COSTLY TO THE GOTT, WHICH HAS CHARTERED FOREIGN AIRCRAFT AND CREW TO COVER BWIA'S SCHEDULE, BUT AS PM WILLIAMS HAS REPEATEDLY SAID, "MONEY IS NO PROBLEM" IN OIL-RICH TRINIDAD.
FOX

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